

# YOUNG ADULT FACT SHEET #12: TOBACCO AND POP CULTURE

WHAT DO THE TV SHOW "FRIENDS", TIME WARNER (DISTRIBUTOR OF MATRIX REVOLUTIONS AND AUSTIN POWERS GOLDMEMBER, AMONG OTHERS), AND THE VAN HALEN VIDEO "PANAMA" HAVE IN COMMON? TWO THINGS: FIRST, ALL HAVE BEEN POPULAR WITH YOUNG ADULTS; AND SECOND, ALL FEATURE SMOKING PLOT LINES, CHARACTERS, OR LYRICS.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Visual mediums make an impact on people the way that no other form of communication can. Millions of images in music videos, television, and movies are reaching young adults every single day. Unfortunately, one of the messages being broadcast in these arenas is the popularity of tobacco use. Tobacco use is portrayed in a variety of ways: by movie stars in hot summer blockbusters, characters on our favorite shows, and even in song lyrics brought to life on MTV.<sup>1,2,3</sup> But the subtle message that smoking is commonplace, even cool, is something pervasive enough that it deserves attention from the tobacco control community.

## MUSIC VIDEOS

The Office of National Drug Control Policy recently completed a study on substance use in music videos.

A sample of 258 videos from the year 2000 showed:<sup>3</sup>

- Tobacco appeared in 21% of videos overall.
- 23% of "Rap/Hip Hop" videos, 18% of "Mainstream Rock" videos, and 17% of both "Hot-100" and "Modern Rock" videos featured tobacco use.
- Tobacco appeared in nearly 1/3 of videos on BET (Black Entertainment Television), 16% of videos on VH-1, and more than 1 out of every 10 videos on MTV.
- The median age of viewers at MTV is 21.5, 26.2 at BET, and 28.1 at VH-1.<sup>4</sup>

## TELEVISION

The Office of National Drug Control policy also completed a study on substance use in prime-time television. After reviewing 168 episodes from the top-42 shows on Network television in 1998-1999, researchers discovered:<sup>1</sup>

- Tobacco was used in 19% of all episodes.
- Characters smoked cigarettes in 68% of episodes in which tobacco use was portrayed, smoked cigars in 36%, and smoked pipes or chewed tobacco in 7%.
- Positive statements about smokers or smoking were made in 13% of episodes showing tobacco use. The negative consequences of smoking were shown in only two episodes.
- Anti-smoking commercials were only shown during 9% of all episodes.

## MOVIES

- A recent study from the University of California, San Francisco, has shown as many as 80% of all movies contain smoking, including almost 90% of R-rated films.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2004, 16-29 year olds accounted for 36% of all movie admissions. 18-20 year olds are also the most frequent moviegoers, with 53% attending at least once a month.<sup>5</sup>
- 1 out of every 10 movies post-MSA still feature tobacco brand images.<sup>6</sup>
- Marlboro is the brand most heavily represented in movies' tobacco brand images (48.8%).<sup>5</sup> It is also the brand smoked most by young adult smokers.

1 Christenson, P.G., Henriksen, L., and Roberts, D.F. (2000). *Substance Use in Popular Prime Time Television*. Washington, D.C.: Office of National Drug Control Policy.

2 Polansky, J.R., and Glantz, S.A. (2004). *First-Run Smoking Presentations in U.S. Movies 1999-2003*. Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education.

Available at: <http://repositories.cdlib.org/ctcre/tcpmus/Movies2004>. Accessed September 14, 2005.

3 Christenson, P.G., Henriksen, L., Bandy, E., and Roberts, D.F. (2002). *Substance Use in Popular Music Videos*. Washington, D.C.: Office of National Drug Control Policy.

4 USA Today. "Spotlight: Youngest, oldest cable channel audiences."

Available at: [www.usatoday.com/printedition/life/20050707/d\\_niels spotlight07.art.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/life/20050707/d_niels spotlight07.art.htm). Accessed September 21, 2005.

5 Motion Picture Association of America. 2004 US Movie Attendance Study.

6 Adachi-Mejia, A.M., Dalton, M.A., Gibson, M.S., et al. Tobacco Brand Appearances in Movies Before and After the Master Settlement Agreement. *JAMA*. 2005;293:2341-2342.

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California Youth Advocacy Network  
Email: [info@cyanonline.org](mailto:info@cyanonline.org)  
[www.cyanonline.org](http://www.cyanonline.org)